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STRICTURES

ON THE
POLITICAL CONDITION

OF THE
J E W S,

FROM THE
ACCESSION OF SAUL,
TO THE
REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT:

IN
A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT GLASGOW BY
HUGH MITCHELL, M. A.
MINISTER OF THAT PARISH.

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Andrew Dawson



STRICTURES

ON THE

Political Condition of the JEWS, &c.

FROM

1st Kings, xxii. chap. I. 2. 3. & 4. verses.

“ And they continued three years without war between Syria
“ and Israel. And it came to pass, in the third year, that
“ Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, came down to the king of
“ Israel. (And the king of Israel said unto his servants,
“ Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still,
“ and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?)
“ And he said unto Jehoshaphat, WILT THOU GO WITH
“ ME TO BATTLE TO RAMOTH GILEAD? AND JEHO-
“ SHAPHAT SAID TO THE KING OF ISRAEL, I AM AS
“ THOU ART, MY PEOPLE AS THY PEOPLE, MY HORSES
“ AS THY HORSES.”

“ ALL Scripture,” said Paul to Timothy,
“ is given by inspiration of God,
“ and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
“ for correction, and for instruction in
“ righteousness.” The passage now read
serves to reprove and to correct.

It is a remarkable fact, but not to the credit of human nature, that, in almost every age and country, *Man* hath been the slave of the King or of the Priest*, and

* Power must be lodged somewhere; but men who think and judge for themselves, will distinguish between a power to govern and the abuse of it.

sometimes of both at once. In several eastern governments†, the subjects, from time immemorial, have been, and at this day are, as absolutely the property and at the disposal of the Sovereign as his herds and flocks.

A tax supposes the subject to be vested in *some* property, but an eastern Monarch is under no necessity of levying taxes, because not the soil only, but every thing upon and under it, is, by indefeasible right, his own. When he sells a territory, he sells the men who inhabit it. When he takes it into his head to make war, he needs only to speak and it is done : from the heart of his seraglio he commands a dignified slave to carry out an hundred thousand *other* slaves to the field of slaughter.

To trace the variety of causes which have contributed to produce this wretched degradation of our species in eastern governments, neither falls within my design, nor is it necessarily connected with the subject. It is however to my purpose to observe, that the Jews had, for a long time, been an exception from the general misery of eastern nations. This singular people, by their religious and political institutions, were put

† Siam, Pegu, &c.

in possession of privileges which no other nation ever enjoyed. By covenant they were devoted to God and separated from the rest of mankind. They were God's peculiar people, and continued, in some measure, to deserve that honourable appellation till the change of their government under Saul.

That this people were under a *Theocracy* is evident, both from the Abrahamic covenant, and from the various extraordinary interpositions of Divine Providence in their behalf. This covenant was afterwards renewed with great pomp at Sinai. Upon that memorable occasion (as we read in Deut. xxvi. chap. 17 verse, &c.) the whole congregation of Israel assembled. The people, on the one part, solemnly “avouch the Lord
 “to be their God, that they will walk in
 “his ways, and keep his statutes, and his
 “commandments, and his judgments, and
 “hearken to the voice of his mouth.” God on the other part, “avouches them to be
 “his peculiar people.”

In the xxviii. chap. of Deut. 3. 4. &c. the blessings of this covenant are very fully and particularly enumerated: But at the beginning of the chapter you will remark the conditions upon which these

blessings were to be bestowed and continued. " If they should hearken unto the " voice of the Lord their God, to observe " and do all his commandments ;" but if they forsook the covenant of their God, they were to incur the forfeiture of all its blessings.

Upon their establishment in the promised land, they came under the government of extraordinary persons called Judges, whom God raised up from time to time. This period continued about two hundred and sixty years: that is, from Othniel the first, to Samuel the last, of the Judges. It comes not within my design to trace the sources of that irreligion and profligacy of manners which began to prevail among them soon after their settlement in Canaan. The fact, however, is unquestionable, that during this period of their government, they grew more and more corrupt. We read that every now and then " they did " evil in the sight of the Lord ;" and that the Lord for their correction and reformation, as often " sold them into the hands of " their enemies."

At the close of Samuel's administration the *Theocracy*, properly so called, seems to have ceased. The Jews grew weary of God

as their king, and publicly threw off their allegiance to him.

This appears with sufficient evidence from 1st Sam. viii. chap. 4th verse, &c. "Then the Elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel," requesting, "that he would make them a King to judge them like all the nations. The thing displeased Samuel." By prayer he consults God in the matter. He receives this answer: "Hearken unto the voice of this people in all that they shall say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

To dissuade the people from a resolution so inconsistent with former solemn engagements, Samuel is commanded to delineate to them the general character and conduct of the princes by whom they should be governed. The remonstrances of the prophet, instead of conquering their obstinacy and reducing them to reason, served only to heighten their clamours, and to give a keener edge to their impatience. "Nay," exclaimed they, "but we will have a king over us, that we also be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles."

In the xiiiith chap. of Hosea, God, referring to the conduct of the Jews on this occasion, says, " I gave them a king in mine anger." Saul was this king. The people clothed him with unlimited authority. He possessed the exclusive privileges of making war, and peace, and alliances; of appointing commanders in the army, of officers of state, and judges in the administration of justice. In a word, *all the powers of government*, the legislative, the judicial, and executive, seem to have been vested in one man.

David, of the tribe of Judah, succeeded Saul in the government. He was a pious, brave, and humane prince. But the almost perpetual wars in which he was engaged, although some of them just and necessary, could not fail to impoverish his subjects. Like other warlike princes, he kept a numerous standing army in time of peace. This expedient he might perhaps have judged necessary, to overawe those petty princes whom he had subjected to pay an annual tribute.

Solomon succeeded to the throne of Judah and Israel. He was a wise and peaceful prince. But although he did not enter into unnecessary and destructive wars, he

purfued measures which produced effects scarce lefs prejudicial to the interefts of his fubjects.

His paffion for magnificence and fhew was extravagant. Carellus, a good critic, calculates the daily provifion that was made for his table to have been fufficient for forty-eight thoufand men. This however was not the worft of it. Some time after his elevation to the throne, he fell into the humour of marrying a multitude of wives, all of them princes' daughters. Not to mention his three hundred concubines, the revenue adequate to the maintenance of feven hundred ladies of high diftinction, muft have been immense; and, if we fuppofe, what is not improbable, that each of them had a feparate houfehold eftablifhment, the expendifure muft go near to beggar calculation.

It is true, the facred record informs us, that, in this reign, " gold and filver
" were as the ftones of the ftreet for abundance."
" dance." A fuperficial reader might thence infer, that the body of the people were prosperous and happy. To fay however that the Jews were a happy people, becaufe their king was rich, and their nobles rich, and their priefts rich, were hardly

less ridiculous than to pronounce *that* man possessed of a sound and vigorous constitution, who is over-run with ulcers from the sole of the foot to the nape of the neck.

The riches brought to Solomon by his Indian fleet, the annual tribute paid him by the nations whom his father had conquered, and the accidental presents made him by foreigners of distinction for his lectures on wisdom, might shed an artificial glory round him; the solid glory of a Prince however consists in making a *whole* people happy, by opening the sources and rewarding the exertions of industry.

The fact is indisputable, that the Jews, towards the close of this reign, laboured hard at the furnace of slavery and oppression. This is evident from the transactions which followed immediately upon the death of Solomon, previous to the accession of his son Rehoboam.

During this short interval, the people made a last effort* to regain their liberty. It was too late. The struggle served only the more firmly to rivet their chains; and they found that it was much easier to lose, than to recover the first of human blessings.

* By Petition and Remonstrance.

In the xiith chap. of 1st Kings, 3d verse, we read, that Jeroboam and all the children of Israel presented to Rehoboam, a humble and respectful petition; praying for a diminution of tribute and of personal servitude. The petition runs in the following terms. "Thy father made our yoke grievous, now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and the heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee." The young monarch dismissed them with the promise of an answer on the fourth day. Meanwhile he consults "with the old men who stood before Solomon his father, who spake unto him, saying, if thou wilt be a servant unto this people, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever."

Such language suited neither the temper of this Prince, nor the high notions of prerogative in which he seems to have been educated. Treating therefore with scorn and indignation the salutary counsel of the old men, he applies to those profligate youths who had been bred up with him at his father's court. They dictate to him such an answer as it was natural to expect from creatures, who whilst they are them-

selves the tools of despots, yet regard the rest of mankind as slaves. " Thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger, shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now, whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

Suffice it to say, that the political condition of the Jews continued the same under the reigns of Abijam and Asa.*

Jehoshaphat the son of Asa succeeded in the government of Judah. He was a wise and pious Prince; but his reply to Ahab in my text is one proof among a thousand besides, that it is a dangerous thing to trust the best of men with too much power.

To the honour of Jehoshaphat we must, however, observe, that he besought the King of Israel to consult the prophets before they set out in the expedition against the Syrians. Ahab complied, and summoned a general convention of his prophets. They assemble to the number of about four hundred. Ahab puts the following question. " Shall

* As the revolt of the ten tribes is not connected with the subject, I have passed it over in silence.

“ I go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or
 “ shall I forbear ?” With one voice the
 prophets exclaim, “ Go up, for the Lord
 “ shall deliver it into the hand of the King ;”
 whilst the symbolical horns of Zedekiah,
 one of their number, seem to have inspired
 the king with a more than ordinary enthu-
 siasm for the battle.

Jehoshaphat *probably* doubting the inspi-
 ration, but *certainly* suspecting the sincerity
 of these prophets, asks the king of Israel,
 If he had not an honest prophet in his
 kingdom, or as the scriptures express it,
 “ A prophet of the Lord besides, at whom
 “ we may enquire ?” The king of Israel
 replied, that there was one man, “ *Micaiah*,
 “ by whom we may enquire of the Lord,
 “ but I hate him, for he doth not prophe-
 “ cy good concerning me, but evil.”

At the pressing instances of Jehoshaphat,
 Micaiah is sent for. It should seem that
 this prophet had been convicted of seditious
 practices ; for we learn, that the messengers
 found him shut up in a dungeon. He is
 carried from his dungeon into the presence
 of the federated Princes. In firm and
 plain language, he declares the expedition
 fatal to Ahab. The king of Israel remands
 him to his dungeon, with this injunction,

that the prophet should be fed "with the bread of affliction, and with the water of affliction," till his victorious return.

Now, my brethren, we may be assured, that these four hundred prophets employed all the credit they derived from their official capacity, to inspire the people with a conviction, that the war in which their king was engaged was not only a just and necessary, but an honourable war. No doubt they besought the God of battles to cover the heads of the federated kings in the day of battle; that he would be graciously pleased to pour out the vials of his wrath upon the Syrians; and that he would restore the victorious troops of Israel in safety to their country and their friends.

To some present it may seem astonishing, that among four hundred and one prophets, there should have been found only one honest man; but if, as Mr. Henry supposes, they had been the King's chaplains, your astonishment will cease. The nettle, it is said, will not grow upon the sea-sand soil; the nettle, we are sure, loves neither the marshy fen, nor the heathy mountain; but ghostly sycophants are weeds that poison every soil, and, what is

singular enough, they thrive well even on barren ground.

Now, my brethren, it may at first sight seem extraordinary, that the prediction of Micaiah had not dissuaded the pious Jehoshaphat from taking any part in the war against Syria; but if we compare the last verse of my text with what immediately follows, we shall find that Jehoshaphat had pledged his honour to Ahab before the prophets had been consulted.* “And he said unto Jehoshaphat, wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth Gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art; my people as thy people; my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to-day.”

This leads me directly to the subject; and my text suggests the three following Inquiries, viz.

1st, Whether Ramoth did or did not originally belong to Syria?

2d, Whether Jehoshaphat did well or ill.

* I am sorry, that it is not in my power to make a better apology for the conduct of Jehoshaphat on this occasion.

in entering into an alliance with Ahab against Benhadad?

3d, Whether Jehoshaphat ought, or ought not to have consulted with and obtained the consent of at least, his subordinate rulers before he waged war with Syria?

The first enquiry is, whether Ramoth did or did not *originally* belong to Syria? Here it may be proper to observe, that Ramoth was situated on the north-east of Jordan in the lot of *Gad*. It was one of the six, which God by Moses had appointed to be cities of refuge for the manslayer, and seems to have been on the frontier between Syria and Israel. From *Justin*, *Strabo*, and other authentic historians and geographers, it appears, that *antient* Syria extended from Euphrates* on the east to Jordan on the west. If so, then, not Ramoth only, but all that tract of country possessed by the two tribes and half, did *originally* belong to Syria.

It may be said, that the Amorites conquered the Syrians, and the Jews subdued the Amorites, and therefore, the land be-

* Were it necessary, it might be shewn from several passages in the New Testament, that the Syrians had been the original inhabitants not only of Gilead, but likewise of the north of Canaan, as far west as the Mediterranean.

longed to the Jews by the right of conquest. Conquest creates power, and power constitutes right. Hence *The right of conquest.*

This, my brethren, is neither the place nor the time to expose the iniquity of many of those claims that are founded in the right of conquest. I shall only observe, that if this right is founded in reason and equity, then the finest provinces in Poland belong to Russia, Prussia, and Austria; and yet it is believed that these Powers have acquired dominion in Poland only by treachery and force.

By the right of conquest too, almost all South America belongs to Spain. The natives of that devoted country were a plain, inoffensive, hospitable, and industrious people: but the Spaniards wanted gold, and therefore murdered seven millions of its inhabitants.

Here I know it may be said, that waving altogether the right of conquest, the Jews were entitled to the land they possessed by a higher right, namely, by a *grant from Heaven*. We shall be told, that Canaan was expressly stipulated to them in the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and which was afterwards renewed to Moses and the

whole congregation of Israel in the wilderness.

All this is admitted. What then? Was the covenant, in which that *grant* was conveyed, unconditional? No. An unconditional covenant is a contradiction. Nothing can be more clear and express than the conditions to be performed on the part of the Jews. They were to "Hearken to the voice of the Lord their God, and to observe and do all his statutes and commandments;" and particularly they were to abstain from the idolatrous practices of the nations whom they had conquered. These were the terms on which *they held the land of Canaan*; the terms on the performance of which all their hopes were founded. It is however notorious, that notwithstanding the strong fences which God had set up against idolatry, the ten tribes, at the accession of Jeroboam, fell into idolatry, and continued to worship the calves of Dan and Bethel at least till the captivity.

From what hath been said, it appears, that Ramoth did *originally* belong to Syria; and that the ten tribes, by falling into idolatry, incurred the forfeiture not of Ramoth only, but of every inch of land they possessed.

I go on to the *second inquiry*, namely, Whether Jehoshaphat did well or ill in entering into an alliance with Ahab against Benhadad?

It will readily be admitted, that the basis of every league is, or ought to be, the reciprocal interests of the parties concerned. It is not difficult to foresee the advantages which Ahab might have derived from this alliance. If the federated Princes had been successful at Ramoth, they would, very probably, have carried their victorious arms to the other frontier towns; to Hamath and Arpad, and so have made themselves masters of the whole frontier between Israel and Syria. An acquisition of the first importance to the king of Israel. But what advantage could Jehoshaphat hope to reap from the most brilliant successes? What was the object of the war on the part of this Prince? I can see none, unless it had been the aggrandizement of a dangerous neighbour and rival, whom the dictates of sound policy should have taught him to humble. From the restless and ambitious temper of Ahab, Jehoshaphat had every reason to believe that he would have embraced the first favourable opportunity to turn his arms against Benjamin and Judah.

Hence I think myself warranted to infer,

that the war with Syria, as far as Jehoshaphat was concerned in it, was unjust, cruel, and impolitic. Unjust, because unprovoked on the part of Syria : Cruel, because a deluge of human blood might have been unnecessarily shed : Impolitic, because Jehoshaphat had much to lose and nothing to gain by it.

I proceed to the *third* inquiry, namely, Whether Jehoshaphat ought or ought not to have consulted with and obtained the consent of his subordinate rulers, before he had waged war with Syria?

It may be said, that Jehoshaphat was an absolute Prince, and therefore needed not to consult with any of his subjects about the expediency of going to war with Syria. I answer, that a wise and humane Prince, altho' clothed with absolute power, will not venture upon war without consulting with and obtaining the consent of subordinate rulers. Did Jehoshaphat not know, that a war begun and carried on with the consent of his people, was, under God, the most likely way to give vigour and success to his arms? Did Jehoshaphat believe himself to be the only *man* in his kingdom, and that the creatures he governed had been given him in a grant from heaven purely to gratify the cravings of avarice, or to execute the projects of ambition?

It were to trifle with common sense to allege in vindication of Jehoshaphat, "*That not a man of Judah or Benjamin fell at Ramoth.*" Without the spirit of prophecy, he could not know that this would have been the case: On the contrary, from the excellent discipline of the troops on both sides, from the courage and experience of the commanders, and especially from the unextinguishable animosity that subsisted between the Jews and Syrians, Jehoshaphat had every reason to expect that the contest would have been long, and the carnage dreadful.

In these expectations what must have been the feelings of Jehoshaphat?—Did he look forward to the probable consequences of the war?—An exhausted treasury and a depopulated kingdom.—Did he look forward to the bloody field strewed with the dying and the dead of his own subjects?—Did he anticipate the tears and sorrows of thirty thousand widows and orphans whom the sword of Syria might have given to his dominions?—Good God! When shall the annals of *man* cease to be the register of cruelties and crimes?—War is an evil of the first magnitude; an evil which a wise and humane Prince will avoid by every mean not inconsistent with the dignity of his crown, the prosperity of his subjects, or the safety of the State.

I conclude with a short illustration of *two* remarks.

1st, That the British Constitution, when compared with the Jewish from the time of Saul, may justly be styled *excellent*.

The best form of Government is that by which the liberty, the property and life of the subject, are most effectually secured. It was a law of Moses, "That whosoever shed-
"deth man's blood, by man shall his blood
"be shed:" and yet in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of that law, some of the kings both of Judah and Israel put their own subjects to death *without the shadow of a trial*. But, by the laws of the *English Constitution*, the King cannot deprive even the meanest subject of his liberty, property, and life, without a legal trial, and a verdict given upon it by his peers.

But, my brethren, when we say that a Constitution is excellent we do not mean that it may not have many defects, much less that it is perfect. *Excellent* is a term of relation, and therefore when we say that a Constitution is excellent, we mean no more than that it is better than many others.

My second remark is, That the ignorance of the people never fails to pave the way for

defects in government and corruption in the administration.

This remark applies with peculiar propriety to the political condition of the Jews during the regal government. You have already seen that at the close of Samuel's administration, this people, like Jeshurun, had waxed fat and kicked, and lightly esteemed "the rock of their salvation." They had grown insensible of the blessings which they enjoyed under the immediate Government of God; they had renounced allegiance to him as their political head, and had refused to be any longer governed by those excellent institutions given them by Moses.

Accordingly they raised their new king above the laws, and from that time the will of the king seems to have been the law of the land. The priests did not fail to improve to their own advantage, the inglorious surrender made on the part of the people. The design of their appointment was, at stated times, to instruct the people in the whole law; I say in the *whole law*, because it was not enough to read those parts of it that respected only the worship of God: the people were likewise to be instructed in that which related to themselves as members of a political community.

That the priests during this period of the Jewish government, had been justly chargeable with the most criminal neglect of the duties of their office, and that, in other respects, they had sunk to a very low pitch of degeneracy, are facts which, it is presumed, will not be controverted by any who is but superficially acquainted with the Bible. We learn that during the reigns, even of some of the Kings of Judah, the book of the law had not been at all read to the people, and that in Josiah's time it was found buried under rubbish in a corner of the temple.

Hence those bitter complaints and those awful judgments denounced against the rulers both in church and state, with which the prophetic writings abound. "My people
 "are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Be-
 "cause thou hast rejected knowledge, I will
 "also reject thee: that thou shalt be no priest
 "to me; seeing that thou hast forgotten the
 "law of thy God, I will also forget thy
 "children." Hos. iv. 6.—"Who shall have
 "pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall
 "bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask
 "how thou dost? Thou hast forsaken me
 "saith the Lord; thou art gone backward:
 "therefore will I stretch out my hand against
 "thee and destroy thee: I am weary with
 "repenting." Jer. xvth chap. 5 and 6 verses.

Further, my brethren, the state of Christendom, from the sixth to the sixteenth century, will furnish another illustration of my second remark. During that dreary night, a night of a thousand years, the king and the priest, although they often quarrelled about other things, yet seem to have entered into a solemn league and covenant to reduce the people to the bondage, and to hold them in the fetters of superstition and ignorance. I enter not into the various circumstances that led to this degradation, some of which were delicate in the extreme.

The fact however is undeniable, that towards the close of the sixth century, man tamely surrendered the exercise of reason; but he was punished for the surrender. For *then* witches and hags; ghosts and goblins; *then* casuists, confessors, and monks; *then*, all hell was let loose upon helpless *man*. *Then* was the golden age of the church, because refractory princes were cowed into obedience by ghostly mandates sealed and ratified in heaven. *Then* religion flourished, because the Pope's exchequer was never empty. *Then*, in a word, the treasures of kings and emperors were carried to Rome to save themselves from damnation, or, (which was the same thing) from the thunder of him who wore the keys of St. Peter.

Is there a man who hath read the history of man during the above period, whose heart doth not bleed for him?

At the Reformation *Man* dared to resume the exercise of reason, at least in matters of religion. Obstacles, seemingly insurmountable, were however thrown in his way. Gibbets, blocks, racks, red hot bars of iron, fire and faggots, piked barrels, and the wheel of St. Dominic. These were the instruments which the Church employed to prevent apostasy, and to punish apostates.

The jealousy of despotism often defeats its own purposes. Accordingly the thunderbolts of the Vatican, although directed by the arm of secular power, instead of extinguishing or even abating the zeal of the Reformers, served only to make it blaze forth with redoubled ardour; so that, like the Jews in Egypt, "the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew."

The Reformation produced no great change for the better on the civil condition of man. Contented with the permission of thinking and judging for himself in those things which relate to a future state, he left his best interests in this world to the exclusive manage-

ment, and unqualified disposal, of the *Powers* that *were*.

The English were the first people in Christendom, who before the Reformation, were emancipated from the thralldom of *political* despotism. But to what causes are we to attribute their emancipation? To the body of the the people themselves? No. Did the love of liberty glow with keener ardour in *them* than in the bosom of Germans and Frenchmen? No. To what then are we to attribute the emancipation of Englishmen? To the tender mercies of their princes? No. Did John and his son Henry, *playing* the degraded state of their subjects, voluntarily abridge the Royal prerogative? No. The foundations of that political fabric, which hath long been the pride of Britons, the envy of Europe, and the admiration of the world, were laid in the clashing interests of Royalty and Aristocracy.

To taste the sweets of freedom is to be free; accordingly, from one generation to another, the fabric received fresh accessions of beauty and strength, till it was completed at the Revolution.

I do not presume to detail the excellencies of the British Constitution. The subject nei-

ther requires it, nor is it a task to which I deem myself competent. However, I scruple not to aver, that as far as your circumstances and opportunities will allow, it is both your duty and interest to acquaint yourselves, at least, with the leading principles of the government under which you live. This is your privilege as Britons, and your birthright as men.

A free and happy government, far from discountenancing a manly and constitutional discussion of its principles and laws, invites you to examine every part of that edifice which hath been reared by the wisdom, and cemented by the blood, of your fathers.

Now, my brethren, it only remains that we join in expressing our gratitude to the Giver of all good, for those sacred and civil privileges with which we are favoured above other nations. Even a small portion of liberty is a rich portion. Let us labour to deserve ours by a suitable improvement of it. Finally, my brethren, let us ever remember, that the end of all good government, whether ecclesiastical or civil, is, "to teach us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

